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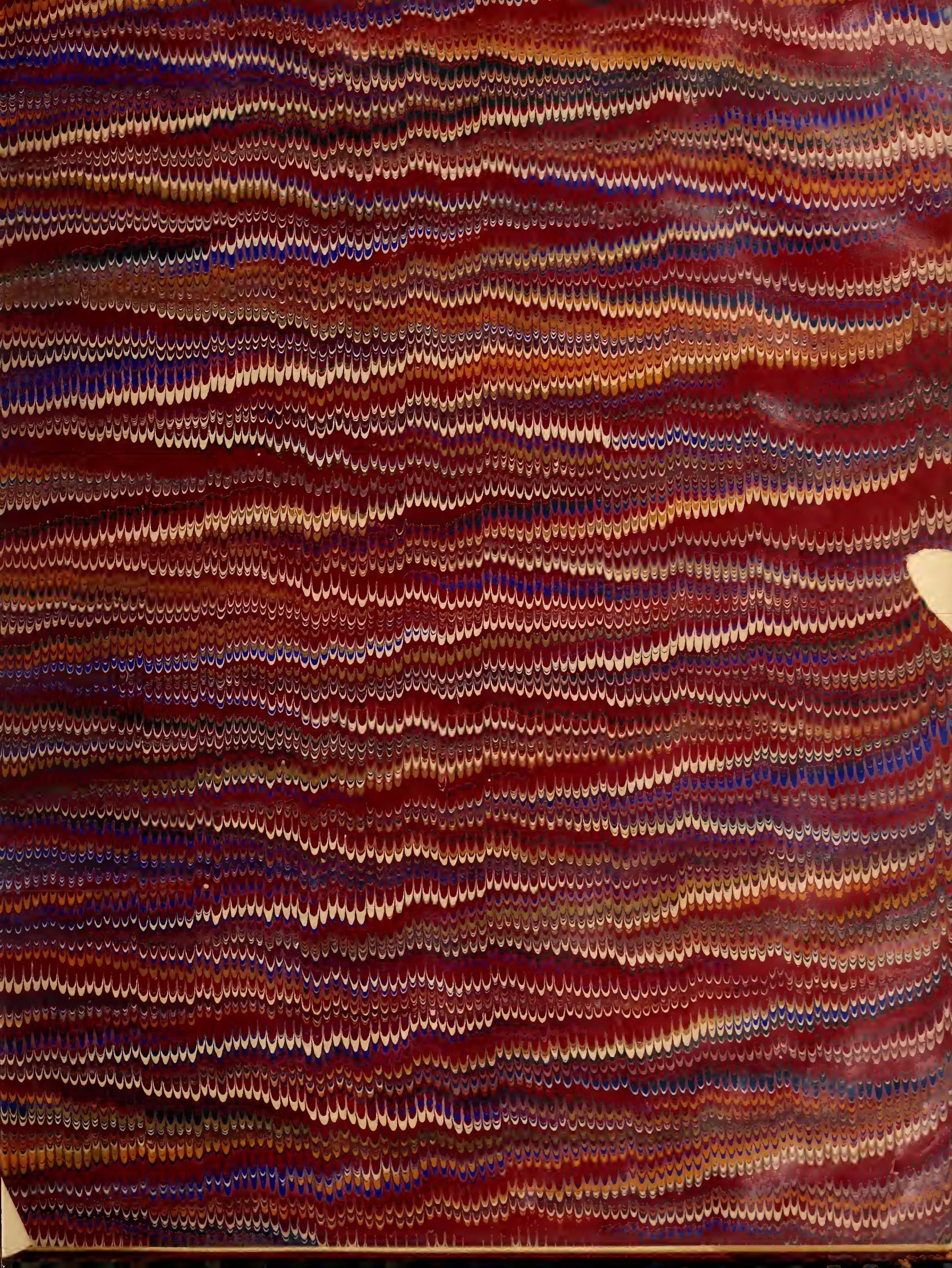
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.













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SKETCH

OF

GEN. GEORGE H. THOMAS,

BY

GEN. JOHN WATTS D'PEYSTER,

FROM

REPRESENTATIVE MEN,

(THIRD EDITION,)

*A Biographical Work,*



PUBLISHED BY

ATLANTIC PUBLISHING CO.,

NEW YORK.







*Geo. H. Thomas*

General George Henry Thomas

## GEORGE H. THOMAS.

BY GEN. J. WATTS DE PEYSTER.

HE poet-laureate of England, in his "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," depicts, in the simplest but strongest language, the characteristics of a perfect republican hero. These, in their strict application, however merited in degree, belonged *not* to the "Iron Duke," but to the "Rock of Chickamauga :"

"Rich in saving *common sense*,  
And, as the greatest only are,  
In his simplicity sublime,

O voice from which their omens all men drew.  
\* \* \* \* \*

"O iron nerve to true occasion true,  
O fall'n at length that tower of strength,  
Which stood four square to all the winds that blew.  
\* \* \* \* \*

"Such was he; his work is done;  
But while the races of mankind endure,  
Let his great example stand,  
Colossal seen of every land,  
And keep the soldier firm, the statesman pure,  
Till in all lands and thro' all human story,  
The path of duty be the way to glory."

Reflecting upon this magnificent poem, whose further quotation is forbidden by restricted space, the critic would find its immediate application utterly impossible to any popular hero, until he studies the career of George H. Thomas. He alone, in the present age, like Gustavus Adolphus, and his favorite pupil Torstenson, in all past time of which we have authentic records, are the only ones strictly worthy of its most exalted passages.

That the following pages present no exaggerated conception of the attributes of George H. Thomas, is demonstrated by the language

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applied to him in various biographies and in obituaries called forth by his untimely decease. In these he is invariably characterized as unexceptionable in his personal purity, his tried ability, and his undeviating success, his unfailing judgment, his noble modesty, his unsurpassed fidelity, and, by all who know the facts, by his astounding forbearance under the wrongs and injustice to which he was subjected by an ungrateful country; finally by politicians steeped in selfishness, and by a people *then* utterly incapable of measuring or taking in the greatness of the man who was serving them to the extent of his ability, while all, but a small minority, were ignoring or misconceiving the vast extent and influence of the services of the man to whom, after all, the salvation of the nation is due more than to any other citizen or soldier.

Although Virginia, "mother of presidents," is the natal soil of so many great men—among these Madison, Monroe, Taylor, Harrison, Scott, Clay, and even the "Sage of Monticello," and although thereon was born and bred the so-styled father of his (this) country, nevertheless, neither the soil nor the peculiar race of "Old Dominion" ever produced a greater son than the hero of this biography, George H. Thomas. It is very doubtful if, taking all things into consideration, Virginia can boast in George Washington as exemplary a citizen as the modest, unselfish martyr to duty, the victor of the only immediately decisive battle of the great American conflict. "Indeed," remarks one who knew Thomas intimately, "Washington was his superior in nothing, while as a general he was greatly inferior."

All the virtues and general abilities ascribed to the mythical Virginian of a century since, all the virtues and military excellence credited to the idol of southern worship in the present generation, all these belonged, in reality, in a greater degree to the man whom his generation does not seem to have been capable of appreciating, on account of the very simplicity which was the peculiar characteristic of the spotless George H. Thomas.

Thomas, like the wonderful Giorgione, of whom Titian was at once the pupil and rival, the first true painter of the New Birth of the most resplendent school of coloring—only exists in the minds of the majority of his countrymen as a GREAT NAME, although he is the greatest this country can boast, not excepting the ideal Washington. Of George H. Thomas it may truly be said again, as of Giorgione, "the inheritor of unfulfilled renown," "the intrepid worker," that even although criticism has reduced the number of his easel pictures

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(works of his own hand) to half a dozen, even so the great undeniable individual achievements of our best general, may be counted upon the fingers of one hand, while it is utterly impossible to calculate the many grand results which he influenced, the many doubtful collisions which his inspiration converted into assured successes. And even as the master hand of Giorgione is scarcely perceptible in his once resplendent frescoes, destroyed by the damp and exhalations of the Lagunes, even so the effect of the presence, influence, and judgment of Thomas on many momentous fields, are lost in a great measure through the misconception, the obtuseness, the hollowness of popular judgment in regard to the real, the sublime.

To Thomas belongs the Sunday "annihilating" victory of Mill Spring, the first success of any consequence beyond the Appalachians, the dawn of hope west of the great eastern battle-ground—Virginia; the other Sunday success fought on the "River of Death," which gave to him the title of the "Rock of Chickamauga;" the tenacious defense of the key to the portal and store-houses of the Confederacy, Chattanooga, in which he made good his promise, "We will hold the town till we starve;" the carrying of Mission or Missionaries' Ridge, at the Confederate centre, opposite "Orchard Knob," or "Indian Hill," which constituted the grand feature of the second battle of Chattanooga proper; and the supreme triumph at Nashville, without a parallel on our continent, the only battle of the war (except Mill Spring on a vastly smaller scale) which resulted in the annihilation of an opposing army.

Like Gustavus Adolphus, whom he resembled in every virtue, and in every grand pre-eminent characteristic, he was taken away because he was too good to be left, and because, if our people could have lifted up their souls to conceive *his*; if their minds could only have taken him in *as he was*; they would have neglected all other idols, and made him the object of their devoted admiration.

In using the word "greatest" to designate Thomas,\* it must be taken in the sense in which it was applied to "the foremost man of

\* It may be interesting to recall in this connection, that Everett, in his so-often-repeated oration upon the career and character of Washington, undertook to demonstrate that his greatness consisted, not in the predominance of any one characteristic, but in the poise, adjustment, and equal bearing of each and all. If this was true of Washington, it was more than true of Thomas, who, under greater provocations than ever Washington experienced, always retained his serenity except when wrong was done to his soldiers. Always alive to injustice to others, his unselfish patriotism made him oblivious of everything he himself was called on to suffer.

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all this modern world," Gustavus Adolphus, whose whole, mental, moral, and physical, was compared to a cube with the motto "*æqualis semper et erectus*," as the only symbol which could convey the perfect solidity, exact poise, nice adjustment, and equal distribution of all that was necessary to enter into the make-up of the "God-like men," on whom common mortals build their trust.

While contemplating the preparation of this sketch, it was impossible not to recognize from the first that the only fitting parallel to Thomas was Gustavus Adolphus, "one who was never dismayed or puzzled from early manhood till the hour of his death." This parallel holds good not only as regards all the virtues of a citizen, and all the qualities of a soldier, but likewise in the physical developments and peculiar traits of the noblest American and the pre-eminent Swede. Both were as remarkable for the manly massiveness of their heads and figures as for their indomitable intrepidity, energy, common sense, and forbearance. Both were alike wonderful in their personal influence, and, it is stated by an eye-witness, himself a distinguished Major-General, that in the grand meeting of officers and generals at Chicago in 1868, when the uproar was at its height, and neither the endeavors of Grant or Sherman had any effect to still the commotion, then Thomas arose and there was peace, and he spoke his few calm earnest words to an audience which listened to him with a demeanor and respect that can scarcely be qualified by any other word than veneration.

The face of Thomas in repose wore a severer expression than that of Gustavus, but nothing could have been more winning than the former's smile. As for his voice it was as gentle as a woman's, and listeners often deceived themselves as to the force of his condemnation of all those who, like McClellan, wasted the lives of our soldiers, and the treasure of the country, by the calm tones in which the judgment was uttered. This was particularly the case in reviewing the "Young Napoleon's" peninsular campaign, and previous inaction. Then the current of the "deep damnation" flowed from the lips of Thomas with the majestic tone and volume of a mighty river.

The more the candid mind reflects, the more, indeed, it will be convinced that, if this country ever produced a perfect character, if history reveals to us anything like a perfect character, if the human mind could divest itself of prejudice, or discern the true metal through the lacquer laid on more or less thick by Fortune, our countrymen

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would recognize in Thomas, the greatest and best man our institutions have developed. The writer felt it and said it while Thomas was living ; he feels it, he sees it, he must express it now that his remains, without a national monument, sleep beneath the soil that his solid virtues and capacities preserved. Yes! the genius of Thomas preserved ! for Thomas not only possessed rare genius, but his genius was combined with equally remarkable talents. Genius creates ; talents apply powers or forces already existing. Genius is the immediate inspiration of the Deity. Like original light, it bursts forth responsive to the demand of the moment or the command of necessity. It is born, full grown, equipped, perfect, like Minerva—*i. e.* practical wisdom—from the brain of the Supreme. It knows no increment, it bridges the gulf which arrests talent. Talent, often of very slow development, is the child of study, experience, and application. To cite two great examples of these gifts, Condé had genius ; Turenne, his great rival, had talent. Genius is the lightning flash of inherent common sense, evoked by the concussion of the moment, and Thomas demonstrated that he possessed Condé's genius when he won his first battle at Mill Spring, and Turenne's talent when he achieved the greatest triumph of our war at Nashville, which decided the fate of the nation ; Nashville, the pivot on which the fortunes of the great American conflict turned ; Nashville, the great decisive battle which wiped out an army ; Nashville, which made the capitulation of Appomattox Court House a possibility. Had Hood been the victor under the walls of the capital of Tennessee, the war would have begun anew, and our over-burthened people, like the martyrs of Revelation, would even now be crying, "How long." Thomas has been accused of being slow; but, like the mills of fate, though he ground slowly, he ground exceedingly strong, and surpassingly sure. He was the "Thought," "*Il Pensiero*," of every army with which he served, and, whether second or first in command, "a strong tower," "*eine feste burg*," on which men leaned, even as the army did, on the field of the 19th, 20th September, 1863, upon the "Rock of Chickamauga."

General Thomas was born July 31st, 1816, on his father's plantation in Southampton County, one of the four extreme south-eastern counties of Virginia. He sprang from, and was connected with, the oldest and best families of the State. His father, John Thomas, was of English, or, more remotely, of Welsh descent, and his mother, Elizabeth Rochelle, was of an old and honorable Huguenot family.

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This was a curious mingling of blood, and if "blood will tell," as the proverb reads, the union of these two races, both remarkable for peculiar qualities, developed and concentrated their strength in our greatest general.

Thomas, in his aspect and build, was a perfect example of that race which, originally known as the Briton, is now almost entirely confined to Wales, and the ancient Armorica, present Brittany in France. The writer has met with individuals almost identical as to physical characteristics in France, but more particularly in the French navy. This was his paternal race. Consequently, according to psycho-physiological laws, Thomas, as he derived his physical conformation from his father, must have inherited his mental and moral characteristics from his mother, and, in accordance with this theory—borne out by the observation of a life time, as well as by ethnological study—his greatness must be credited to his maternal origin, the Huguenot. This, almost altogether Gothic in its origin, gave a moral, mental, and male force to France of which the French nation are acknowledged, by wholesale murder and Papal persecution, "to have lost the very seed." It is no vain boast nor empty assertion to claim that the Huguenot race\* has constituted the leaven of the modern world. It has directly or indirectly produced the greatest soldiers who have illustrated the past five centuries. The effect of the French protestant emigration has been seriously and gloriously felt from Sweden north to Algiers south; from Moscow east to Limerick west. To it we credit Coligni, greatest of French citizens; Duquesne, greatest of French admirals; William III., greatest of Royal reformers; Frederick the Great, greatest of Royal generals. Ethnological and historical investigators attribute the decadence of France to its expulsion; the universal progress of humanity to its dispersion; and, as if the blessing of God accompanied its exile, wherever papalism drove it, every nation that welcomed and fostered it, in accordance with the hospitality and opportunities

\* To prove that this is no exaggerated view of the mighty influence of the Huguenot blood, the reader is referred to a number of standard works, but particularly to the "Histoire de France," by the celebrated J. Michelet, also to "The Prussian Race, ethnologically considered," by Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages, London, 1872, particularly chapter viii., "French immigration in the seventeenth century." Hundreds of works might be cited, but these are accessible to all, as the latter appeared originally in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, article VII. "M. Guizot and the failure of French Protestantism," from the *Spectator*, republished in No. 1585, Oct. 24th, 1874, of Littel's Living Age.

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afforded it, that nation has advanced in greatness and power with the strides of a giant. Moreover, in the case before us, if another proverb be true, that no great men are issued from any but the womb of a great mother, it is but just to concede to the Huguenot parent the spring and force of the illustrious career of one who most honored the national uniform by the wearing of it.

As Major-General Geo. W. Cullum's "Biographical Register of the West Point Graduates" furnishes a detailed statement of the early service of George H. Thomas, it is needless to say more than that, after graduating July 1st, 1840, he served with distinction against the Seminole Indians in Florida; in the Mexican war; and down to 1860 against the Western Indians. At the breaking out of the late Civil War, he was Lieutenant-Colonel of the 2d U. S. Cavalry, and Colonel 3d May, 1861. August 17th, 1861, he was made Brigadier-General of Volunteers in the "Department of the Cumberland," and, November 30th, 1861, he was placed in command of a division of the "Army of the Ohio." It was while occupying this position that he won a victory, 19th-20th January, 1862, which may be said to have been the first clear dawn of hope at the West. There had been, it is true, a few faint indications of the coming light, but this was the real upburst of the sun from behind the mountains of gloom, diffusing the brilliancy of a day which was to know a still more glorious sunset in the crowning triumph of Thomas at Nashville.

In regard to the battle of Mill Spring there were some remarkable circumstances which have never been brought before the public. By the way, the title of this battle is a misnomer, for Mill Spring was on the south side of the river where there was no fighting, whereas the collision occurred rather at Beech Grove, or on Fishing Creek, near Logan's Cross Roads, names more appositely applied to this engagement by the Confederates. The perfect system of outpost duty inaugurated by Thomas prevented such a surprise on this occasion as at Shiloh or Pittsburg Landing. His perfect appreciation of the value of time decided the next phase of this important operation, and his common sense converted a side issue into a decisive master-stroke.

On this occasion Thomas had an opportunity to display that exquisite common sense, which, in all men who possess it, but especially in him, amounts to what the world considers genius. Griffith is right in saying that whenever genius can and does discover

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and apply a remedy at a life or death crisis, it is God himself working through and in men.

At Mill Spring, Thomas knew that his or any green troops were incapable of manœuvring, especially under fire, and he determined that no attempt to make a single useless movement should mar the grand result. He told the writer that he placed himself, so to speak, like a marker on the line of battle, and saw or felt each regiment file by into its proper or assigned position. Then he faced them, indicated the enemy, and bade them go in and do their duty. And, filled with the inspiration of their leader's calm assurance of victory, they did both. This conduct on the part of Thomas was genius, for it *is* genius to comprehend exactly of how much a body of troops is capable, and it is greater genius so to handle them as to get out of them all that the leader determines they shall do, and the troops, through confidence in him, realizing the words of Virgil, "*possunt quia posse videntur*," are reciprocally able to do.

At Mill Spring (repeating, to emphasize), the manner in which Thomas brought up, posted, and fought his new levies, was exactly the same kind of manifestation of genius as that display of common sense by which L. Aemilius Paulus converted the victory, all but won by the phalanx at Pydna, into the final overthrow, instead of the Greek power, there, 22d June, B. C. 168. This common sense was as much genius as the conception of the oblique order by which Epaminondas triumphed at Leuctra and Mantinea, and acquired imperishable renown; as much genius as the command "*fieri faciem milites*," which decided Pharsalia and the destinies of the world.

At Pydna the charging phalanx, with their sarissas (pikes twenty feet long) locked in the shields of the two front lines of the Roman legions, compressed into one by the impact, was bearing all before it. Suddenly, a happy inspiration, or impulse of instinct, or exertion of common sense, prompted the Roman general to withdraw the alternate maniple or company, so as to render the pressure or resistance to the even front of the phalanx irregular and unequal. The result was as sudden almost as the conception, the order, and its execution. The previous level front of the Greek spears pressing on, at once accommodated itself, responding to the unequal resistance, and from a straight, became a crooked, sinuous, or undulating line, presenting gaps and exposed flanks, like the teeth of a saw. Into these gaps the Roman legionaries (swordsmen) cut in with their short, deadly weapons, against which the long unmanageable Greek spears were

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helpless. Thus, the common sense of L. *Aemilius* Paulus decided the fate of Greece at a blow, whereas an hour before the Roman legions accounted themselves nearly if not actually defeated.

The same kind of common sense, which amounts to genius, illustrated Robert, the Bruce, perhaps under every aspect "the greatest of Scotchmen." He knew that every success won over his brave countrymen by the Southron was due to those English archers, of whom it was said that "each one of them carried under his belt twelve Scottish lives." This remark referred to the number of arrows each Bowman had disposed ready to his hand on going into action. It is well to remember, here, that the greatest victories which England ever won were due to these very archers, a militia, a reality, not a name, which has had no parallel and only a faint imitation in the Norwegian skating battalions, the Tyrolese riflemen, the Swiss national levies, and the frontiersmen of America.

Appreciating this peril, Robert Bruce had a body of light cavalry, ready at hand, which he let loose upon the English archers as soon as they came into action, and these "rough and ready" riders cut up the bowmen before they could be supported, and thereby won the decisive battle of Bannockburn, which achieved the independence of Scotland. Strange to say, with such an example before them, no subsequent Scottish commander ever profited by the lesson, and crushing defeat, following upon similar national disaster, again and again, as at Hallidon Hill, Nevilles Cross, at Flodden, and on other fatal fields, entailed the ruin of Scotland, and placed it at the mercy of England. Just what L. *Aemilius* Paulus was at Pydna, Bruce at Bannockburn, and the Regent Murray at Crookstone,\* Thomas was at Mill Spring.

Men judge of greatness by success, which Albert Sydney Johnson said "is a hard rule, but a just one." If this nation remembers that Thomas never failed; that whether as a subordinate, as a second in command, as an "*Adiatus*," or "*Alter-ego*," or as Commander-in-chief, he never failed,—what estimate must the American people

\* At Crookstone, 13th May, 1568, the key point of the field was the pass through the village of Langside. To win this coin of vantage, the adherents of Mary, Queen of Scots, hurried forward and were met by the troops of the Regent Murray, equally aware of the advantages of the locality. The Regent, however, a consummate soldier, while urging on his cavalry, had the foresight to mount a footman behind each trooper. These infantry were better adapted to maintain the position than mounted troops, and, thus brought up, held it. This stratagem was one of the chief causes of the Regent's success, which cost Mary throne and country, and eventually her life.

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put upon such a man? Every other general during the war, at one time or another, met with reverses or failures. Criticism can debit no failure to Thomas,—envy no reverse. What does this prove? What else but that he was a God-chosen instrument, and, as such, the grand figure—the first man of the war!

“Oh happy the man around whose brow he (death) wreaths the bloody laurels in the glitter of victory.”

The movements which led to the battle of Mill Spring were out of the general plan of campaign on either side, and produced by the independent advance of a detached force of Confederates, consisting of two brigades of infantry, a battery, and a small cavalry brigade, to invade Kentucky from Tennessee. At that time, January, 1862, the Rebellion was very strong. Its front line stretched along the border Slave States, Tennessee in its full possession, and Kentucky seriously threatened with absorption. McClellan was Commander-in-chief, and the vicious “*anaconda*” strategy of attacking with numerous independent armies along a thousand-mile frontier, was going into operation. The Confederate Generals, Crittenden and Zollicoffer, under these circumstances marched into Kentucky to the south bank of the Cumberland, and finally crossed it and camped at Beech Grove, some little distance north, intrenching their position. General Thomas, with one brigade, had advanced meanwhile to Logan’s Cross Roads, a few miles north, feeling for his enemy. He halted at the fork of two roads, the Somerset and Mill Spring roads, and awaited the coming up to his help of Sehoepf’s brigade from Somerset. Rainy weather and bad roads detained Sehoepf, and Crittenden very wisely decided to attack Thomas, while he himself was two to one—5,000 (Greeley), 8,000 (“Army of the Cumberland,”)—6,700 Confederates to at most 3,500 Unionists in presence. He advanced north in two lines—Zollieoffer’s brigade leading, Carroll’s following, most of his cavalry in reserve, and two companies skirmishing in advance. They found but two Union regiments, the Fourth Kentucky, and Tenth Indiana, with a battery and squadron to oppose them at first.

The Confederates had marched at midnight, attacked their foe four to one at dawn, but not by surprise. Thomas, with green troops to handle, knew the necessity of avoiding surprises; his far outstretching infantry, and still more advanced cavalry pickets, gave timely warning, and the two regiments, with the battery, held their foes in check till eight o’clock. By that time the Second Minnesota

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had come up with the Ninth Ohio, and the four regiments were marched up in line, and not only held the enemy, but finally drove him back. One more regiment, the Twelfth Kentucky, reached the field while the front was still hotly engaged, and Thomas put it on the left, flanking Crittenden's right, at the same time the Ninth Ohio charged Crittenden's left. Thus, swept in on both wings, the Confederates gave way, and fled in confusion. Zollicoffer was killed, the whole force chased into camp, which they abandoned in the night, while Thomas captured twelve guns—two on the field, ten inside the works (eleven more were spiked and thrown into the Cumberland river), one hundred and fifty wagons, fifteen hundred horses and mules, tents, etc.; in fact, every stick and rag that belonged to his enemy, except their clothes and muskets with which they fled.

The battle was gained with green troops, by putting them in a long line without reserves, extending the wings and flanking the enemy by the simplest of all movements—a wheel inwards (the winning tactics of Cannæ by Hannibal, and of Zama by Scipio); in fact, by overwhelming them by a more extensive concentric development and consequent weight of fire. It was lost by Crittenden through inferior practice of his artillery, and fighting on too small a front. Green troops in reserve to support other green troops proved useless. The first reverse cowed them, and they only swelled the crowd of fugitives. Put in one line and used as Thomas utilized his, they must have won the battle from sheer weight of fire. As it was, they lost heart at Zollicoffer's death, fled in confusion, laid Tennessee open to our arms, and, worst of all, gave the Union forces the advantage of a decided victory, which raised their *morale*, and lowered that of the Confederates to an extent from which they never recovered afterwards.

It is scarcely possible to estimate too highly the effects of this success, one of the most important, if not actually the most important, achieved by the national arms. It broke the line of the Confederates in Kentucky, opened a door of deliverance for East Tennessee, and prepared a way for that series of successful operations by which, very soon after, the invaders were expelled from both States. Well might the Secretary of War conclude his thanks in orders by declaring, "In the prompt and spirited movements and daring at Mill Spring, the nation will realize its hopes."

And yet a subordinate came very near depriving Thomas of the credit of this triumph, through the prejudice, as yet entertained,

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toward loyal Virginians. There is no necessity of reviewing the scandal, but on this occasion even Lincoln was unjust, and when he learned the truth, he was still unwilling to reward the victor as he deserved. The President, when urged to repair an injustice founded on a mistake, said: "Thomas is a Virginian, he can afford to wait;" and he did have to wait, receiving, like Kearny, his promotion among a batch of others who had accomplished nothing commensurate to his triumph at Mill Spring. This fact the writer had from Thomas himself; and, although the whole occurrence was related without asperity, the tone and manner demonstrated that even in his placid bosom the wrong must have been deeply felt at the time; and that lapse of time had not effaced it from his memory, or softened its bitterness.

Seldom, if ever, in the history of a nation and a great war, has a pre-eminent citizen and soldier been subjected from first to last to such an unintermittent sequence of neglects or injustices as George H. Thomas. The tardy and insufficient recognition of his saving success at Mill Spring has been already referred to. This he strongly resented, although he bore it with the same calm dignity with which he continued to suffer while serving, with a fidelity almost unexampled, under similar provocations. The reader is yet to learn how the government continued to pursue the same course of injustice towards its most faithful and capable servant. While others, who had accomplished comparatively nothing, were pushed into prominent positions, Thomas was kept in such subordinate ones that nothing but his individual force of character could have brought him into proper notice. It was not circumstances, but the man himself which made the whole Western army come to look upon him as a sort of palladium, whose very presence was an *agis* or safeguard at the last against disaster. So it was, as either a general of division or in command of the right wing of the "Army of the Tennessee," he passed through the resultless forward movements which eventuated in the ideal siege of Corinth, a parallel to McClellan's imaginary siege of Yorktown, and those which brought the national forces back in September, 1862, to Louisville, after Buell had permitted Bragg, to all appearance, to work his will in Tennessee and in Kentucky. When, at Louisville, Buell worked out in his own mind a new plan of operations, and, to use the stereotyped phrase, "reorganized" the "Army of the Ohio," orders came from Washington, removing Buell and appointing Thomas in his stead. Thomas, with that patriotic self

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negation which was the prominent characteristic of the man, telegraphed back to the administration that as the army was to move the next day, and that as he was not adequately acquainted with Buell's plan of operations, it would be better to make no change until the result of Buell's conceptions, good or bad, could be demonstrated. How briefly this is referred to in the report of Thomas to the Hon. Committee on the Conduct of the War, the following paragraphs will show:—

"September 29th.—Received orders at the hands of Colonel McKibben, aide-de-camp staff of Major-General Halleck, commanding United States Army, assigning me to the command of the Army of the Ohio; but declining, the order was countermanded.

"September 30th.—Was announced as second in command of the Army of the Ohio per Special Order No. 159, headquarters Army of the Ohio. Continued in this position throughout the campaign in Kentucky."—"Conduct of the War." Supplement, Part I., page 23.

The result of this remonstrance was the retention of Buell in his command. To Thomas was assigned the supervision of the right wing of the army, General Gilbert having succeeded him in the command of his own corps. Mark the result. After the next failure at Perryville Buell was removed, but Thomas, instead of being rewarded for his fidelity and disinterestedness, was punished for Buell's shortcomings, and Rosecrans, a new man,—a new man, however, worthy, and none worthier,—was appointed in Buell's place, and Thomas left, still, in a secondary position. Just the same thing occurred after Chickamauga. When Thomas had saved everything, he was allowed to keep the bed warm for Grant; and, when Grant was transferred to the East, again for Sherman. Again, under Sherman, the plan seems to have been to exalt McPherson at the expense of Thomas. Finally, after Thomas had won the battle that settled the matter everywhere, Sheridan was promoted over his head. This was the last straw which broke the camel's back of his silent forbearance, and the writer fully believes but for this promotion Thomas would now be alive. One remark of Thomas will serve to elucidate what the writer desires to express. He once remarked, that he felt annoyed that it was necessary to insist upon attention being paid to his wishes. Now, in the case of a man who entertained such a modest estimate of his enormous services, it seems about equivalent to saying he did not obtain justice at all. As to the importance of the triumph achieved by Thomas at Nashville, one fact will have to suffice in the restricted space accorded: Colonel ——, Brev. Brig.-Gen. U.

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S. A., who was in command of a district at the far South at the time, stated that there were sixty thousand Southern soldiers who were waiting the result of Hood's operations in Tennessee, to determine their future action. They had their muskets and equipments ready to take the field again, if Hood was victorious. When the news of his annihilation reached them, they put away their arms and equipments, and recognized the situation, for they felt the game was up.

Finally, contrast the independent course pursued by Thomas. When others were accepting houses and donations and benefactions, Thomas refused every proffered gift; and would not even allow the members of his staff to present him a tea service, or offer it to his wife. And when the reborn Rebel sentiment in the Tennessee Legislature led that body to disgrace themselves in regard to his portrait, which their loyal predecessors had procured and placed in a position of honor in the capitol, he wrote to them to send him the picture, which was now out of place in the chamber of such a body, and that he, out of his limited means, would restore to a disloyal territory what a loyal administration had expended for the likeness of the man who had preserved Tennessee to the Union, and the nation itself under the walls of Nashville. Immortal powers! what self negation and manly independence characterized his career throughout. The mythical patriotism of a Cato, of a Cincinnatus, or a Regulus, sinks into insignificance before such real, consistent conduct as that of Thomas. Like a sun in the heavens he moved on in the majesty of his glorious oneness, while the moons were revolving in their borrowed or contributed light.

Not a dollar that he drew or received had any odor but that of honest guerdon for services rendered; and, obedient to the precept of the inspired prophet, precursor of the Great Exemplar, he did "violence to no man, and was content with his wages." Like St. Paul, he was beholden to no man, laboring for his subsistence, while the salvation of many people was due to his integrity.

Again: the writer had a letter from him when his nomination for the Presidency was suggested to the noble citizen and soldier. In this the manly dignity of the hero shines forth in its accustomed lustre; and, denied the position in his peculiar line—the generalship or the lieutenant-generalship, which was only due to his great services—he refused to become the mere instrument of party, for the manipulation of politicians, doubtless to experience the fate of the

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honest hero of Buena Vista. If it be true that "consistency is a jewel," then the life example of George H. Thomas is a Koh-i-noor of patriotic and dignified light.

The writer enjoyed a very peculiar connection with Thomas, carried on through a desultory correspondence of years before they met. It was through common friends that the intense admiration, appreciation, and respect, which had evoked this sketch, was developed into something akin to Celtic hero-worship by personal intercourse. Something akin to this, indeed, was felt by every individual capable of appreciating true manhood, who came in contact in any way with Thomas. One day the writer said to a common friend (Rosecrans), "Rosy, Thomas was an angel, was he not?" "Well," replied the matter-of-fact victor of Stone River, "is not that going almost too far? I cannot exactly say that." "Oh, but I mean as near to an angel as a mortal man can be." "Yes, I agree to that."

On another occasion, conversing with one of our most brilliant corps-commanders—one who held a position next to command in chief at a great crisis—THE crisis according to general opinion—and speaking of Thomas and Humphreys, this "superb" soldier remarked: "When you have said all you can in praise of Thomas and of Humphreys, you have told all that is to be said; there is nothing to be said on the other side—no dispraise." "The ablest soldier this country ever produced" are the words of a letter from "the hero of the battle above the clouds," and victor of Lookout Mountain.

As these remarks grew out of a reference to a correspondence, the following letter in reply to mine, asking Thomas if he would accept a nomination for the Presidency, would seem to come in appropriately here. It explains itself, and is so characteristic that it is extremely interesting from its demonstration of the unselfish patriotism of the great soldier at a time when almost all our successful commanders were hoping that their military services were about to prove stepping-stones to political promotion or the profuser emoluments of political office.

HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE CUMBERLAND,  
LOUISVILLE, (KY.), APRIL 20, 1867.

GENERAL J. WATTS DE PEYSTER,

59 East Twenty-First Street, New York City.

DEAR SIR: I received your favor of the 9th inst. some days ago, but have not had time to reply until to-day.

First, you must permit me to acknowledge my grateful sense of your kind appreciation of my services; and

Second, I will here state, and hope you will report for me whenever you hear

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my name mentioned in connection with the Presidency of the United States, that I never will consent to being brought before the people as a candidate for any office. I have too much regard for my own self-respect to voluntarily place myself in a position where my personal and private character can be assailed with impunity by newspaper men and scurrilous political pettifoggers and demagogues.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

GEORGE H. THOMAS.

Of all the battles of the Great American Conflict, the finest as to resultiveness, the finest as to execution, the finest strategically and tactically, the finest as a study and as an example to be referred to and cited hereafter, was Nashville. It was indeed a decisive battle. It was the Waterloo of the four years' struggle. Some of Sheridan's fights approach it in resultiveness, but cannot compare when the forces respectively engaged are taken into consideration. Nashville was a first-class battle in every sense of the word. A soldier's interest does not begin with the fighting. It begins far back with the assembling of the troops in methodical, steady, progressive preparations for something which should be satisfactory when it came off; nor does it end with the fighting. There was a crash and a dissolution on the one side, and an instant following up and pursuit on the other, of which there are but few instances in the military history of the Old World. According to a friend learned in military lore, the antecedents to the battle were worthy of Napoleon, supreme in strategy; to which opinion, however, the writer takes this exception. The action of the battle was rather worthy of Frederic, incomparable in tactics, to which our learned friend accedes, and the profiting by what had been fought out was worthy of that Blucher who multiplied energy, unsurpassed by a patriotic hatred to his opponent, which seemed to make him and his soldiers in a great measure insensible to fatigue, want of food, and deprivation of sleep—hardest to be borne. So much so, that, either through his influence or the proverbial "Prussian spur," the very horses seem to become patriotic. This last remark refers to the excuse of the French General Nansouti in Russia, "that he could appeal to the patriotism of his men for extra exertion, but that their horses had no patriotism—the only appeal in such cases to them was corn," or their feed in general.

It has always been considered that the campaign of Nashville was a part and parcel of Sherman's grand operation of 1864. A critical examination of the facts, since all the facts have become known, will hardly bear out this view of the case. When Sherman

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wheeled to the left for his march to the sea, he left Thomas as independent a part to play as that which he reserved for himself, and a much more important part, since all that he had to do was to march a sufficient and well-adjusted army through a country denuded of military defence; whereas Thomas had to create and organize an army, and then fight a desperate antagonist. While collecting his forces for this battle, Thomas fell under the disapprobation of those who never pardoned any shortcomings except their own. The great loyal Virginian bore the impatience which growled in his rear with the same equanimity with which he watched the fury chafing in his front. He was content to appear to be besieged, because he was resolved to wait until he got a "good ready," as Rosecrans expressed it, and because he knew that the duration of the siege depended solely upon his own good-will and pleasure. The accumulation of his forces very much resembled the gathering of a thunderstorm around the peak of a mountain—growing darker and denser, fearful to contemplate, while the surrounding sky is still serene, and only a few murky clouds, floating here and there, disturb the smiling azure. Then comes a sheet of flame which blinds the eye, quickly succeeded by a crash as if numerous batteries answered batteries along a lengthened line of battle. The eye is dazzled with the rapidly succeeding flashes, the earth quakes as the storm-cloud descends amid torrents of rain; and, in a few minutes, day has almost become night, amid the roaring of the waters, the howling of the wind, and the groaning of the smitten forests. So it was with Nashville. The country stood expectant until the suspense was ominously burdensome. Then, almost simultaneously with the rousing up of the lion from his cover, the country recognized what awful wrong it had done to Thomas in doubting for one moment his capacity to grapple with the occasion, and convert the unavoidable delay into such a triumphant issue as more than shamed the general injustice which had dared to underestimate that glorious man who could bear the miscalculation of his powers in silence; and then, in the fulness of time, strike as no one before had ever struck on any battle-field during the War for the Union. Another circumstance must be taken into consideration. This battle was fought in the depth of winter, or rather at the worst period of the year, when it is impossible to calculate what the ensuing day will bring forth, while yet the rigor of the season is certain to manifest itself in phases the most difficult for an army to overcome, or for the soldiery and their animals to support.

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Perhaps the chief cause which delayed the aggressive of Thomas was the difficulty experienced in remounting his cavalry,—that cavalry which he was determined, so far as he was concerned, should play their appropriate part in disposing of the enemy after they had been broken up by the infantry. Even as it turned out, he was not enabled to obtain horses for more than 3,000 to 4,000. These performed most effective service, and the residue rendered very efficient service in another way, acting as a sort of light infantry.

Hood having escaped from Sherman at Atlanta, after menacing the long line of communication of the army which had so signally defeated him under the defences of that place, struck off on a tangent, that, had there been no Thomas in its way, might have completely stultified the saying attributed to Sherman, that if Hood would only pursue the course which he had evidently marked out for himself, he (Sherman) would willingly furnish him with rations to enable him to run his race of recklessness.

If any evidence was needed to prove the incapacity of Davis to arrive at a correct judgment of men and estimate them at their proper value, it was in his substitution of Hood for Joseph E. Johnston, the greatest general of the Confederacy, a head and shoulders taller in regard to ability than any other commander which the Confederacy possessed. Davis, in the exhibition of his favoritism, had committed fatal errors,—fatal as respected the immediate events which depended on his appointments. Pendleton had cost him Vicksburg and the valley proper of the Mississippi; Bragg had lost him Eastern Tennessee, of a value almost incalculable to the Confederacy, as a loss irreparable, and Chattanooga, the key to that middle zone, whose possession threw open the door to the armed flood which burst the rebel States asunder.

On December 2d, 1864, Hood sat down before Nashville, himself deluded with the idea that he was investing Thomas, while that sturdy old warrior was quietly getting ready to give him his quietus. This, when he had his forces in hand, he did indeed give, and disposed of the Confederacy as an armed power west of the Alleghanies. The contrast of the rash presumption of Hood and the thoughtful calmness of Thomas would almost justify a smile had it not involved the death and mutilation of so many brave men.

Hood's line constituted an obtuse angle along the crest of a curve of hills, with its right resting on the Nolensville Pike, its left on the Hillsborough Pike, at Brentford Hills,—both wings separated by quite

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a long interval from the river. The whole line presented a front of six to seven miles, whose apex was on Montgomery Hill, not over two hundred yards from that of Thomas's, and consequently in the immediate presence of our troops, with both wings refused. Hood's force was at least 40,000 old troops, veterans in the real sense of the word, aggregated from different corps, besides good cavalry. Accurate judges increase this to 42,000 in line. Strong, however, as Hood was in the number and excellence of his troops, these did not present, by any means, all the startling difficulties that Thomas had to overcome. Captain Lippett, in his "Treatise on Intrenchments," furnishes a good idea of Hood's preparations. To avoid the charge of exaggerating the dangers vanquished by the Union troops, let him tell the story :—

"At the battle of Nashville, the Confederate General Hood had carefully chosen two positions, one in rear of the other, in which to receive our attack ; and Hood employed much time and labor in intrenching them. His first line was six miles in length, stretching over the wooded sides and crests of a series of high hills, which were covered with breastworks, rifle-pits, and abattis, with guns sweeping all the approaches. But on the first day of the battle, this formidable line was made untenable by his left being smashed in and turned,—compelling him to fall back to his second line, which was only three miles in length, but stronger, because more concentrated; nevertheless, on the second day, by the turning of his flank and rear by Wilson's Cavalry, combined with Smith's and Schofield's attack on his left, he was forced to abandon his defences, and his retreat soon became a Waterloo rout."

The Union line had a less flattened formation, much nearer to a right angle, with the angle rounded off. This line was very strong, since every commanding position was occupied by a fort or a redoubt. At first Steedman's provisional (so to speak) corps held the extreme left, and Schofield's Twenty-third corps the Union left centre; Wood's Fourth corps was in the centre; A. J. Smith on the right; Wilson, with his cavalry, on the extreme right of the line.\* Thomas, with his staff, occupied a prominent position on a hill about the centre-front, overlooking the whole field of battle, and thence he dispatched his aids and orderlies with orders for the movements in accordance

\* It has always been a vexed question as to how many available troops Thomas had in this "big fight." Col. Stone, formerly Asst.-Adjt.-Gen. to Thomas, calculates the actual strength of the Union army on this field at 35,000, although nominally there were 43,000. It was thus composed: 1, Steedman's provisional (so to speak) corps, middling troops, colored, convalescents 8,000—really 6,000; 2, Schofield's 23d corps, or "Army of the Ohio," good, 10,000—really 8,000; 3, Wood's 4th corps, good, 10,000—really 8,000; 4, A. J. Smith's 13th corps, A. No. 1, 8,000—8,000; 5, Wilson's Cavalry, used as a rule here as Infantry, 7,000—really 5,000. An average of the estimate on paper, 43,000, and under arms 35,000, would give, according to Stone's

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with the plan discussed and resolved upon the previous evening, which acted like clock-work and as effectually as a series of Krupp's twenty, thirty, and fifty-ton trip-hammers striking in as predetermined.

Hood's attention was invited to our left and riveted upon our centre where the antagonistic lines drew nearest together. Then the Union right swung forward, A. J. Smith attacking; Wilson's Cavalry likewise attacking, and, at the same time, turning; while a smaller independent force of cavalry were holding a body of Confederate horse in check which menaced our right outermost lines, ungar-nished by the forward sweep of that wing.

As soon as Hood began to perceive what was going on on his left, he withdrew troops from that portion of his line to reinforce the menaced wing. Thomas, foreseeing that this would occur, slipped Schofield over to the right of Wood, and massed his corps under cover; and his place on the left of our line was filled with quartermaster's troops—good men enough, but unacclimated to the bitter heat of battle,—troops which had hitherto constituted the garrison of the city. As soon as the Confederate left began to roll up under Wilson's attack and crack under the pressure of A. J. Smith, Wood went in upon the centre, which crumbled under his blows and those of Schofield. Thus Steedman's aggregated command had done good work. Their initiative operations against the Confederate right, although that right was able to oppose a strenuous resistance, had a decisive effect on the result, since it attracted Hood's attention. Finding his left so

calculation, 38,000. Some of the Cavalry (Hammond's division) did not cross the river, but remained at Edgefield. Wilson had the divisions of Johnson, Kuipe, and Hatch. McCook's division had gone up into Kentucky after the rebel general Lyon.

The officer who prepared the statement of Thomas' operations for the Congressional "Report of the Conduct of the War, Supplement, Part I," says: "Thomas' effective force in front of Nashville numbered 42,000; that of the enemy being about the same—if any thing, a little greater than our own."

"Commencing on the right, the Cavalry (mounted and dismounted) under J. H. Wilson, about 8,000; A. J. Smith's corps (the 17th) about 12,000; T. J. Wood's corps (the 14th, and formerly Stanley's) about 11,000; and on the left of Wood was a provisional division of about 5,000 men, under J. B. Steedman, comprising colored troops, convalescents from hospitals, stragglers from Sherman's column, hundred day troops, and odds and ends generally. Our losses during the two days of battle were less than 3,000; that of the enemy was 84 guns, taken by assault, many battle-flags, and about 6,000 prisoners. From the opening of the fight by Steedman on our left, to its close by breaking the enemy's centre, General Thomas' written order-of-battle was adhered to, and the battle itself went off like a written play at a theatre."

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roughly handled and his right holding firm, he weakened his right in a great degree to strengthen the opposite wing, subjected to the first shock heavy enough to stagger him. With the smashing in of Hood's centre, the keystone of the Confederate arch was knocked out, and the curve, already shaky with the pressure at other points, crumbled at once. With the setting sun and rapidly succeeding darkness, the day's work was complete and well ended.

The gain in prisoners and trophies was sufficient to attest that Thomas had won what the Generals at the East, and, in fact, almost every General, except one of the first two classes—which embrace only such very few captains—would have claimed as a decided victory, for the world esteems the occupancy of the battle-field a victory. Add to this the capture of numerous prisoners, guns, and some colors, and the unreflecting masses toss up their hats and shout a most glorious triumph. Thomas, like all great generals, did not consider that he had done sufficient to cry, "Hold, enough!" while anything remained to be done, and Hood was too resolute a man, and his troops were too good soldiers to yield the palm while there was still enough cohesion among them to hold them up, and enough discipline to enable Hood to draw up the Confederate Army of the Tennessee for another trial.

Hood gathered up his army as well as he was able, and disposed them along the crest of a second curve of elevations, the Harpeth Hills, several miles further to the rear, and about five miles south of Nashville, presenting very much the same general formation as that which his army had assumed on the 15th. This new line was about three miles in extent, from wing to wing. Thomas now again repeated the same series of manœuvres, which, admirably executed, had been so eminently successful on the 15th. The struggle on the 16th was more bloody than that of the preceding day, but the result was the same. Pressed on the left by Smith, turned and rolled up on the extreme left by Wilson, forced in on the right by Smith and Schofield, and tapped in the centre again by Post, Wood, and Steedman's colored troops, each effort being made coherently and in accordance with plan and orders,—this time the Confederate line not only crumbled, but went to wreck.

Pollard, Confederate historian, says: "A stampede suddenly took place in one of his (Hood's) divisions, and the day was lost in a moment." ("The Last Year," XX., 423.) The Confederate army went streaming off toward Duck River, jostling, jarring, dashing itself to

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pieces like old ice, cake against cake, field against field, all broken up, driven and jumbled, by a sudden and tremendous spring-freshet. "The break in Bates's division," again observes Pollard, "was the signal for a general panic in Hood's army. The moment a small break was made in his lines, the whole of two corps unaccountably and instantly fled from their ditches, most of them without firing a gun. It was a disgraceful retreat. Fifty pieces of artillery and nearly all of Hood's ordnance-wagons were left to the enemy. Our loss in killed and wounded was disgracefully small; and it was only through want of vigor in Thomas's pursuit that Hood's shattered and demoralized army effected its retreat. He finally made his escape across the Tennessee River, with the remnant of his army, having lost, from various causes, more than ten thousand men, half of his generals, and nearly all of his artillery. Such was the disastrous issue of the Tennessee campaign, which put out of existence, as it were, the splendid army that Johnson had given up at Atlanta, and terminated forever the whole scheme of Confederate defence west of the Alleghanies."

And thus Nashville was made by Thomas one of those victories which can hold up its head, and claim as to consequences there, elsewhere, and everywhere, to take rank with Rocroy, Leipsic, Wittstock, Janikau, Rosbach, Lissa, Jena, Torgau, Fleurus, Laon, and Waterloo. Thomas had shown so much ability, and had taken such prompt advantage of every mistake on the part of his adversary, that Hood's rout had no parallel in the history of the war. Had Hood held his cavalry in hand, the result might have been modified in a small degree, but not sufficiently modified to change the grand result. He committed the same error of which Lee had been guilty at Gettysburg, when the latter allowed J. E. B. Stuart and his cavalry to get altogether out of his reach, so that they effected nothing, and could not work in together, at the appropriate place, in time. Even so Hood had previously blundered before Atlanta, in detaching Wheeler with his cavalry—a most important element of success—and had suffered accordingly. And even as in the presence of Sherman, Hood had let go his hold upon Wheeler, even so, again, before Thomas, the Confederate commander sent off Forrest on a "bootless errand," and allowed him to get beyond his control. Doubtless it had a very serious and disastrous effect upon the fortunes of the rebel "Army of the Tennessee." For this Hood could blame no one but himself. Thomas also experienced a drawback in

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the absence of a sufficient bridge-train. This lack, however, was in no wise chargeable to him. In the same way that Burnside was crippled in December, 1862, through the absence of pontoons, a lack chargeable at Washington, the pursuit by Thomas was seriously impeded, at first, especially, at Rutherford's Creek, and then at Duck River. Thus a loss of three days was occasioned by a deficiency in transportable bridge material, in which branch Thomas had not been able to complete his preparations. The engineers' train of Thomas had been rendered (perhaps necessarily) imperfect, to perfect Sherman's arrangements for the march to the sea. All historians are aware that the possession of an ample bridge-train enabled Rudolph, of Hapsburg, to cross, promptly, the Danube in 1276, and settle the fate of his rival, Ottocar, of Bohemia. Thus, a few pontoons may be said to have secured the imperial crown of Germany for nearly six centuries to the House of Hapsburg.

The absence of a sufficient train with the Union army alone enabled Hood's crumpled wrecks to escape utter annihilation. As an organized force, the rebel Army of the Tennessee had made its last campaign, and fought its last battle. "When the year 1864 went out, (this) the Confederate army of the West may be said to have expired with it," and one army, or grand military quantity, was blotted out from the war equation. The Count of Paris, in his history of our Civil War, applies identically the same language to the result of Mill Spring—the first triumph achieved by Thomas—as that which almost universal consent considers as due to his last. The Count says: "the Confederate army was annihilated" (page 294, Vol. II. "*Histoire de la Guerre Civile en Amerique*," par M. le Comte de Paris, 1874).

The great generalship of Thomas had ended the business west of the Alleghanies, and the battle of Nashville had amputated the left leg at the hip and the left arm at the shoulder of this stupendous Rebellion. Indeed, it is not claiming too much to say that Virginia's great loyal son decided the rebellion itself in the two days' battle he planned and fought on the 15th and 16th of December, 1864, on the banks of the Cumberland.

It is said that in the majority of cases, it is almost sufficient to narrate the prominent incidents of the careers of great men and the results thereof, to furnish their best biographies.

The rule referred to is eminently true, where men have filled such peculiar positions that their individuality was not obscured by facti-

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tious surroundings. Very often the greatest of men, of whom "the world knows nothing," are the imperceptible souls which animate huge masses of clay, thus realizing the idea of St. Paul, that the things which are not seen far transcend in glory those that are visible. The reason is, that which is seen is merely earthly, while that which is invisible (except through its effects), like the influence of Thomas, is, to use the words of the great historian Arrian in regard to Alexander, "an evidence of the direct interposition of God through man."

How little, for instance, does the world know of Marshal Traun, to whom Frederic the Great acknowledged that he "went to school" in the art of war. Traun was an "Adlatus," or an "Alter-Ego," or directing chief of staff, a "military dry-nurse," as Carlyle styles him, to whom Austria owed all her triumphs about a century and a quarter since—triumphs attributed in history to members of the imperial house. Traun was to his arch-ducal superiors exactly what Von Blumenthal has been in Prussia's later wars to the Crown Prince of Prussia. About such was Thomas for the long period of his career to more than one superior,—acting in one campaign, as he smilingly observed to the writer, "as a balance-wheel." Fortunate for the country that our western armies had such "a balance wheel."

This egotism—if such a defect as egotism could find sufficient nutriment to continue to exist in a nature so simple, modest, and truthful as that of Thomas—expresses little more than what Sherman is said to have remarked in an exigency or a tight place, after he had sent Thomas back to Nashville. "I wish old Thom was here. He's my off-wheel horse, and knows how to pull with me, though he don't pull in the same way."

Always necessarily restricted as to space in the present work, it is impossible to enter into a consideration of the continual influence exercised by Thomas in all the battles in which he held a subordinate position. Whatever may have been the effect of his presence and co-operation in all, no one can diminish his glory in the first and last fields on which he appeared—Mill Spring and Nashville. There Providence allowed him to act alone, and entirely for himself.

It is in such a case as either of these, as Schiller indicated in his famous "Troopers Song" in "Wallenstein's Camp," that a soldier and a general is tried.

"For there a man feels the pride of his force,  
And there is the heart of him tried;  
No help to him there by another is shown,  
He stands for himself and himself alone."

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Rosecrans summed Thomas up nobly in his report of the battle of Stone River, or Murfreesborough, "as true and prudent, distinguished in counsel, and on many battle-fields for his courage." Again, in his report of Chickamauga : "To Major-General Thomas, the true soldier and incorruptible patriot, the thanks and gratitude of the country are due for his conduct at the battle of Chickamauga." But what needed Thomas the praise of any man ? His best praise is his consistent life. That there is "no dispraise" to be spoken of him, such is his greatest eulogy.

In regard to the account herein following, of Nashville, two curious facts are notable connected with it. The position of the troops and their movements were indicated by a few pencil-dashes on a scrap of paper by Major-General Zealous (significant and appropriate), B. Tower (equally expressive), Chief Engineer to Thomas. Notwithstanding these rapid indications were so clear, that from them, as from stenographic symbols, the writer was subsequently enabled to complete his narrative as fast as the pen could run. The proofs were then submitted to Thomas, and handed back by him without correction as to fact, and with only a few verbal alterations. A portion of these proofs were rescued from the ruthless hand of the printer, and have been preserved as precious mementoes of "our greatest, with the least pretence." Rosecrans, who was deeply interested in the preservation of the opinions of Thomas, declared with great feeling, that it was positively wicked not to have written down the words of Thomas, during an evening expressly devoted to a critical examination of the campaigns in which he participated. His words were veritable strictures upon several deemed above criticism by their countrymen. Unfortunately, a sudden and severe attack prevented the writer from keeping the next appointment when notes were to be taken of the conversation, and sickness compelled a precipitate return home for medical treatment. Before convalescent, Thomas had left Washington; and, to the writer's lasting sorrow, they never met again.

In reviewing the Atlanta Campaign, Thomas certainly expressed opinions which justified the conclusion, to use the words of Tennyson, that

"Some one had blundered."

Thomas said that when Sherman lay looking Joseph E. Johnston in the eye at Dalton, he went to his superior, and said: "Sherman, let me take the 'Army of the Cumberland,' move through Snake

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Creek Gap, and get in the rear of Johnston. He must come out and fight me, and I can whip him with the 'Army of the Cumberland,' alone. But, worst for worst, if he should get the better of me, you can come upon him with the Armies of the Tennessee and the Ohio, and, between us, we can rub him out. His men will take to the mountains, but he must abandon his artillery and trains, and there will be an end of the matter." "No," replied Sherman; the 'Army of the Tennessee' are better marchers than the 'Army of the Cumberland,' and I am going to send McPherson." On learning this, I put on my hat and returned to my quarters, for I saw the game was up. You know the result; McPherson was stopped by a brigade, went to digging, and Johnston slipped by, and so it was down to Atlanta.\*

"As for the 'March to the Sea,' there was nothing to stop Sherman from going where he chose. I said to him, 'Let me take the 'Army of the Cumberland,' and I will go wherever you indicate—to Mobile, to Savannah.' Nothing could have prevented me; but he chose to send me back to Nashville, and I obeyed, as I always did.

"While I was getting a 'good ready' at Nashville, Grant's communications and telegrams used sometimes to nettle me. At times I thought I would telegraph back, 'If you want me to go out at

\* "Shortly after his (Sherman's) assignment to the command of the military division of the Mississippi, General Sherman came to see me at Chattanooga, to consult as to the position of affairs, and adopt a plan for a spring campaign. At that interview I proposed to General Sherman that if he would use McPherson's and Schofield's armies to demonstrate on the enemy's position at Dalton by the direct roads through Buzzard Roost Gap and from the direction of Cleveland, I would throw my whole force through Snake Creek Gap, which I knew to be unguarded, fall upon the enemy's communications between Dalton and Resaca, thereby turning his position completely, and force him either to retreat toward the east, through a difficult country, poorly supplied with provisions and forage, with a strong probability of total disorganization of his force, or attack me, in which latter event I felt confident that my army was sufficiently strong to beat him, especially as I hoped to gain a position on his communications before he could be made aware of my movement. General Sherman objected to this plan for the reason that he desired my army to form the reserve of the united armies, and to serve as a rallying point for the two wings, the 'Army of the Ohio' and that 'of the Tennessee' to operate from.

"(Later, when the campaign in Georgia was commenced, the 'Army of the Tennessee' was sent through Snake Creek Gap to accomplish what I had proposed doing with my army, but not reaching Snake Creek Gap before the enemy had informed himself of the movement, McPherson was unable to get upon his communications before Johnston had withdrawn part of his forces from Dalton, and had made dispositions to defend Resaca.")—"Conduct of the War." Supplement, Part I. Report of Major-General THOMAS, page 201-2.

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Hood with inferior forces, why don't you go in at Lee with such superior forces?' But I am not given to writing or telegraphing, and so I kept quiet; and when I thought I *was* ready I attacked Hood, and I think the result justified me."

"General Thomas, if you had been superseded what would have been the result?"

As the answer to this in the words of Thomas (his modest manner gave a significance and meaning to his words which cannot be expressed on paper), if given verbatim might appear egotistical to those who did not know him, sufficient to say he intimated that his army would not have fought as it did under any one but him.

In the *Tribune* of the 19th March, 1870, an article appeared signed "Another Man," answering a previous publication apparently reflecting upon Thomas. It was so pertinent that it is impossible to forbear partial quotation. It concludes as follows: "And however great the merits of Schofield or Logan or General Grant himself, nobody who knows what that army was, and what its failings were, will dare dispute the fact that his (Thomas') removal would have proved a great if not a fatal error, and that a very large part of the enthusiasm, vim, and heartiness with which the battle of Nashville was fought was due to the fact that in the current words of the men in the ranks, 'This is old Pop's fight, and we are going to win it for him.'

As a friend of Rosecrans, the writer asked Thomas if he blamed Rosecrans for what occurred at Chickamauga. "No farther than this," was the reply; "Rosecrans, after getting Chattanooga, should have acted as I did—he should have paid no attention to Halleck or Stanton, or the pressure from Washington. The 'Army of the Cumberland' had done a good nine months' work in driving the Rebels out of Tennessee, and getting a foot-hold south of the river. Rosecrans should have waited to get another 'good ready' before he pushed forward again. I would have asked to be relieved sooner than act on compulsion contrary to my judgment. When a general commanding an army is ordered to do what he feels that he ought not to do, he should act upon his own opinions, and let things take their course. Rosecrans was only blameable for his blind obedience to orders which I knew to be wrong." Thus Thomas, it seemed, held to Bayard's doctrine: "Do what you yourself think right, let happen what may."

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This led to the observation, "General Thomas, it is said that you disobeyed at Chattanooga (like Soult in regard to attacking the Heights of the Pratzen at Austerlitz, exactly a similar case to Chattanooga), because you knew the time had not come. Did you say that the battle turned out about as well as if it had been fought as it was planned?"

Thomas smiled, then answered to the effect that the orders for his attack on the Confederate centre, in his opinion, were premature; and that he believed his delay was not only justifiable but altogether correct, and "that was the reason that I expressed myself as I did in my report." \*

The writer does not pretend to give the very words of Thomas during this conversation, but believes what is now presented is the exact force and purport of them.

Thomas was almost without an imitator, if not absolutely alone in his mode of living in the army. Elegance, simplicity, and solid comfort, characterized everything about him. His chief attendant—a respectable contraband—absolutely idolized his master, as he had good reason to do, for Thomas had ordered one of his officers in command of a cavalry raid, to rescue Phil's wife and family from worse than Egyptian bondage. This was successfully accomplished, and the faithful negro had the satisfaction of knowing, while he was repaying his benefactor with vigilant fidelity, those dear to him were in safety on the soil of freedom. His other servants, never changed, appeared to have become imbued with the undeviating deportment, decorum, and habits of the master. Nay, his very horses seemed to resemble each other, and were noble, powerful, and sedate animals, becoming their rider. Shanks, in his "Personal Recollections," enters into quite a detailed description of the habits of Thomas. Speaking of breakfast, he says: "Daylight and breakfast were announced simultaneously by an elderly, dignified, and cleanly attired colored servant. \* \* \* The breakfast-table was spread under the fly-leaf of the tent, which served as a kitchen, and on it smoked fresh beef, ham, and strong black coffee. At each silver plate was a napkin of

\* It will be perceived by the above report, that the original plan of operations was somewhat modified, to meet and take the best advantage of emergencies, which necessitated material modifications of that plan. It is believed, however, that the original plan, had it been carried out, could not possibly have led to more successful results."—*Conduct of the War. Supplement, Part I. Report of Major-General THOMAS, page 137*

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the purest white, artistically folded in the latest style of the first-class hotels, a silver water-goblet, a china cup, and the usual knives and the silver forks. Better beef and better coffee could not have been found in the country in which the army was campaigning, while the hot rolls and potatoes, baked in the hot ashes of a neighboring fire, would have made many a French cook blush.

"When beginning the campaign of Atlanta, Sherman endeavored to effect an important innovation in the habits of his army by carrying out to the very letter his instructions to 'move light,' *i.e.*, without extra baggage. In order to impress upon his officers the necessity of setting a good example to the men, he published an order, in which he stated that the 'general commanding intended making the campaign without tent or baggage.' The hint was lost on most of the officers, and among others on Thomas, who moved in his usual heavy style, with a complete headquarter train and the usual number of tents, adding indeed to the usual allowance a large wagon arranged with desks, which, when covered by a hospital tent fly, made a very complete adjutant-general's office.

"The campaign began, and Sherman made several days' march without his tent, sleeping anywhere that night overtook him; but before reaching Resaca he was very glad to take up his abode near Thomas' headquarters, and make use of his tents and adjutant-general's office."

The world, as a rule, judging great men through their little judgments, and almost invariably accepting gilding for gold, may confound the honest convictions based on deep thought, long experience, actual supervision, and solid judgment, for the utterances of men in very high places, who, puffed up with their success, utter oracular opinions, which are often sheer talk without thought. No one who knew Thomas will question his modesty; but, on the other hand, no one who knew Thomas could question that he had fixed opinions, and expressed them freely. His modesty consisted in his manner, his language, his under-estimate of his own services and his over-estimate of the services of others, where the pretensions founded upon them were not run into the ground.

"General Thomas is the purest man I (Shanks) met in the army. He was the Bayard of our army—*sans peur, sans reproche*—and I have endeavored in vain to find a flaw in his character. His character is free from every stain, and he stands forth in the army as above suspicion. He has gone through the war without apparently exciting

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the jealousy of a single officer. He has so regulated his advancement—so retarded, in fact, his promotion—that when, as the climax to two years' hard service, he fought a great battle and saved a great army, and was hailed and recognized by the whole country as a hero, not one jealous or defeated officer was found to utter dissent to this popular verdict."

As the best exemplification of the idea which the writer is endeavoring to convey, the reader's attention is directed to the two following letters, from men as highly distinguished in their several ways as any in the country. As a scientific as well as a fighting soldier, no one stands higher than "pure gold" Major-General Humphreys, Chief of Engineers, U. S. A., nor is any one more highly esteemed, as a calm, judicious, dignified, and honest civil official, than L. F. S. Foster, Senator from Connecticut, and, for two years, acting Vice-President of the United States during the Presidency of Andrew Johnson. The incident could be told in fewer words, but to the majority of minds the original language carries with it ten times greater force than a narrative which might appear to be too highly colored through partiality for the character or affection for the man.

WASHINGTON, May 30, 1874.

*My dear General:*

I have not been able to write you until now, and threw aside even to-day matters pressing on me, to write you even briefly, for my mind is full of other subjects. It was I that mentioned to you Thomas' address, or account of his Nashville campaign. There was formerly a small club in Washington that met at each other's houses, taking them in succession, for conversation upon and discussion of scientific subjects. The evening was closed by an inexpensive supper. It was usual for a member to invite any stranger in Washington who might be supposed to take an interest in such matters. Finally, it became the custom for the member at whose house the meeting took place, to give an account of anything that he thought interesting, or have some friend do so.

One evening when the club met at General Eaton's (Commissary-General of Subsistence), General Thomas was present, and gave us an account of his Nashville campaign, illustrated by maps. There were only about fifteen persons present. The exceeding modesty and diffidence of General Thomas in this narrative, made a very strong impression on me. He reminded me of a diffident youth at West Point undergoing the yearly examination, whose suffering on such occasions only those afflicted with diffidence can comprehend and remember, which they do to the last days of their lives. The perspiration gathered profusely on his forehead. This painful diffidence in a man who had had such experiences greatly surprised me, and its simplicity almost amused me. Occupied as I had been all through the war with what was taking place with the Army of the Potomac, I knew but little of the manner in which the operations of other armies had taken place. General Thomas' account

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gave me a different view of his operations and the battle of Nashville, from what I had previously had, and corrected some erroneous impressions. He seemed to me just as simple-hearted as when I had met him in Florida at the time he joined his regiment, coming fresh from the Military Academy.

Sincerely yours,

A. A. HUMPHREYS.

Major-General DE PEYSTER, N. Y.

NORWICH, CONN., May 30th, 1874.

*My dear General DE PEYSTER:*

In answer to your favor of 23d, I would state that I recall very readily the account which Gen. Geo. H. Thomas gave one evening before a scientific club in Washington of the battle of Nashville. He had drawn plans showing the position of the opposing forces, and he pointed out the order of attacks as made in the different points along the line, and stated the result of the several movements. Substantial success was attained by the Union forces at every point, the enemy was beaten back, and the close of the first day indicated strongly what became complete on the day following —his thorough defeat.

I scarcely need say that we all listened to General Thomas with rapt attention and with great gratification. His plans and statements were so clear and explicit that I think every one present must have obtained a good idea of the plan of the battle and of the manner in which it was fought. What struck me very forcibly, and I presume others present were impressed in the same manner, was the apparent forgetfulness of himself in connection with the events he was describing. Had we not known that he was the commanding general, and that every movement was the result of the action of his mind and will, we should never have imagined it from any allusion he made to himself. But when he came to pronounce an opinion upon the whole subject, and to point out, as he did, what he called a grave error of judgment, he made himself prominent at once, and threw the blame entirely on himself.

At the close of the first day, he says he ought to have detached a force and sent it round to the rear of the enemy, and cut off his retreat. Had he done so, he would have captured nearly or quite the whole of Hood's army. As it was, Hood was enabled to effect his retreat. I asked him if he was not pronouncing a rigorous and unjust judgment, and suggested that at the close of the first day it was impossible for him to decide whether Hood's forces were thoroughly demoralized and defeated or not. That if he had detached a force of sufficient strength to the enemy's rear to cut off his retreat, whether it would not have so weakened his attacking columns the second day that they would have fought with less confidence of victory; and whether, if Hood's men had known that their retreat was cut off, it might not have given them the energy of despair, and impelled them to fight so as to turn back the tide of victory. He did not yield at all to my suggestions: he said that a general must be prepared to take some risks, and that Hood's army ought all to have been captured. The entire absence of all self-assertion on the part of General Thomas—his unaffected modesty—were most conspicuous the whole evening. It seemed to me that had any other officer but himself been in command, he would never have indulged in so severe a criticism of his conduct.

Believe me, very truly yours,

L. F. S. FOSTER.

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In conclusion, no more is needed than to quote a few lines contributed by a lady, the wife of the Medical Director on the staff of Thomas—Mrs. Col. F. M. Gross. They possess one merit—TRUTH; and they speak the opinion of the best minds of the nation:—

How seldom, in the lapse of centuries,  
There lives a man so great, that when he dies,  
His record is beyond all eulogies !

Yet one such has been with us—simple, grave,  
Upright and noble, resolute and brave,  
To God and duty he his manhood gave.

Of such rare excellence, that when he died—  
Died in his prime—a startled nation cried,  
“This is a loss that cannot be supplied.”

He should have been our next chief magistrate :  
He would have dignified that high estate,  
And by his greatness made his country great.

When shall we find us such another man,  
So sure in action and so ripe in plan,  
So able every moment's need to span?

In all the after annals of this age,  
Shall patriot and statesman, bard and sage,  
Point out as his the one consummate page.

And through the coming years shall history  
Echo regretfully the people's cry,  
“The loss of Thomas no man could supply!”

This biographical sketch could have been much more extended by the presentation of opinions and explanations expressed and made by General Thomas to the writer, but these are withheld at the express request of one who has the best right to decide as to their publication, and upon the advice of a general officer, whose calm judgment almost converts his counsels into commands.





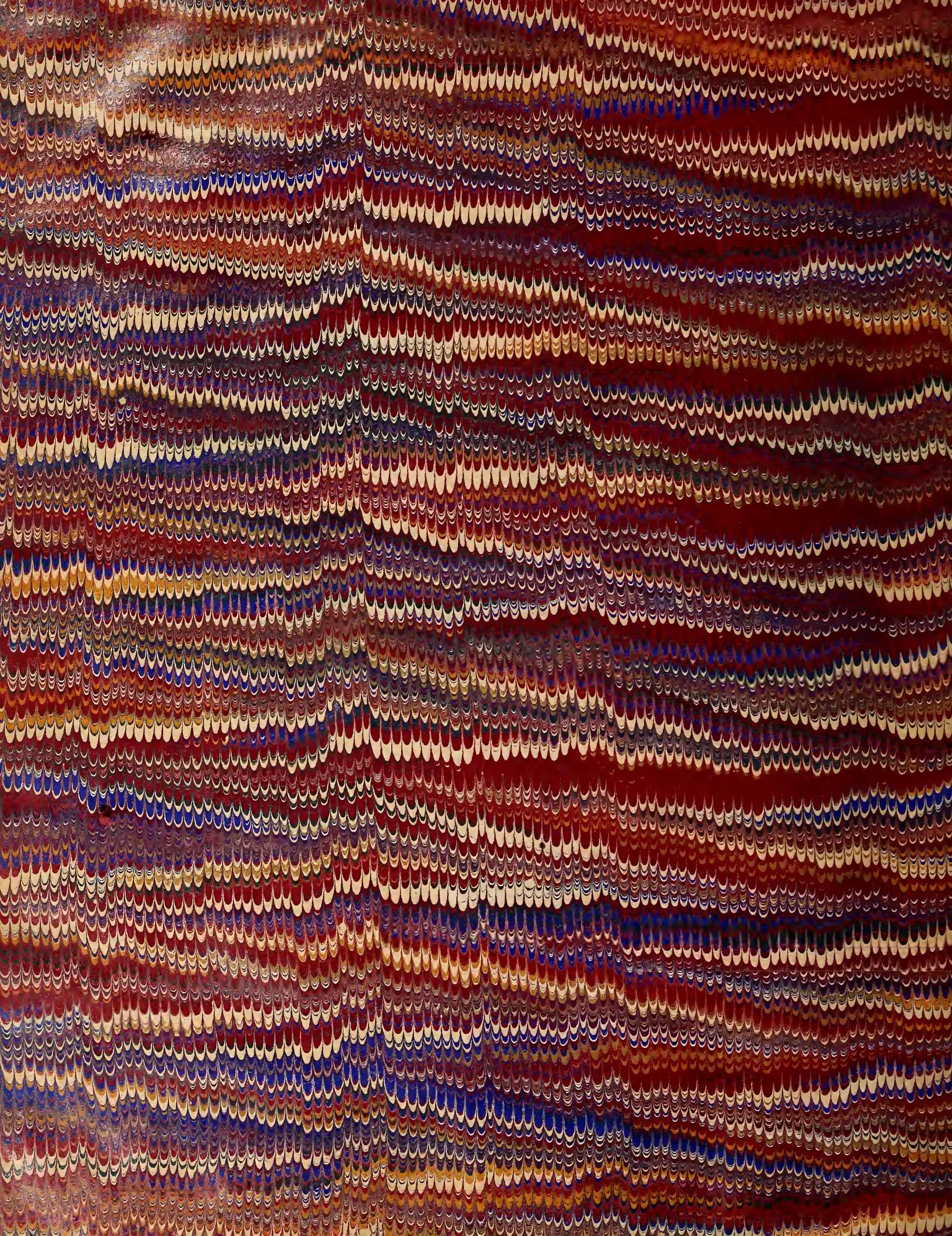


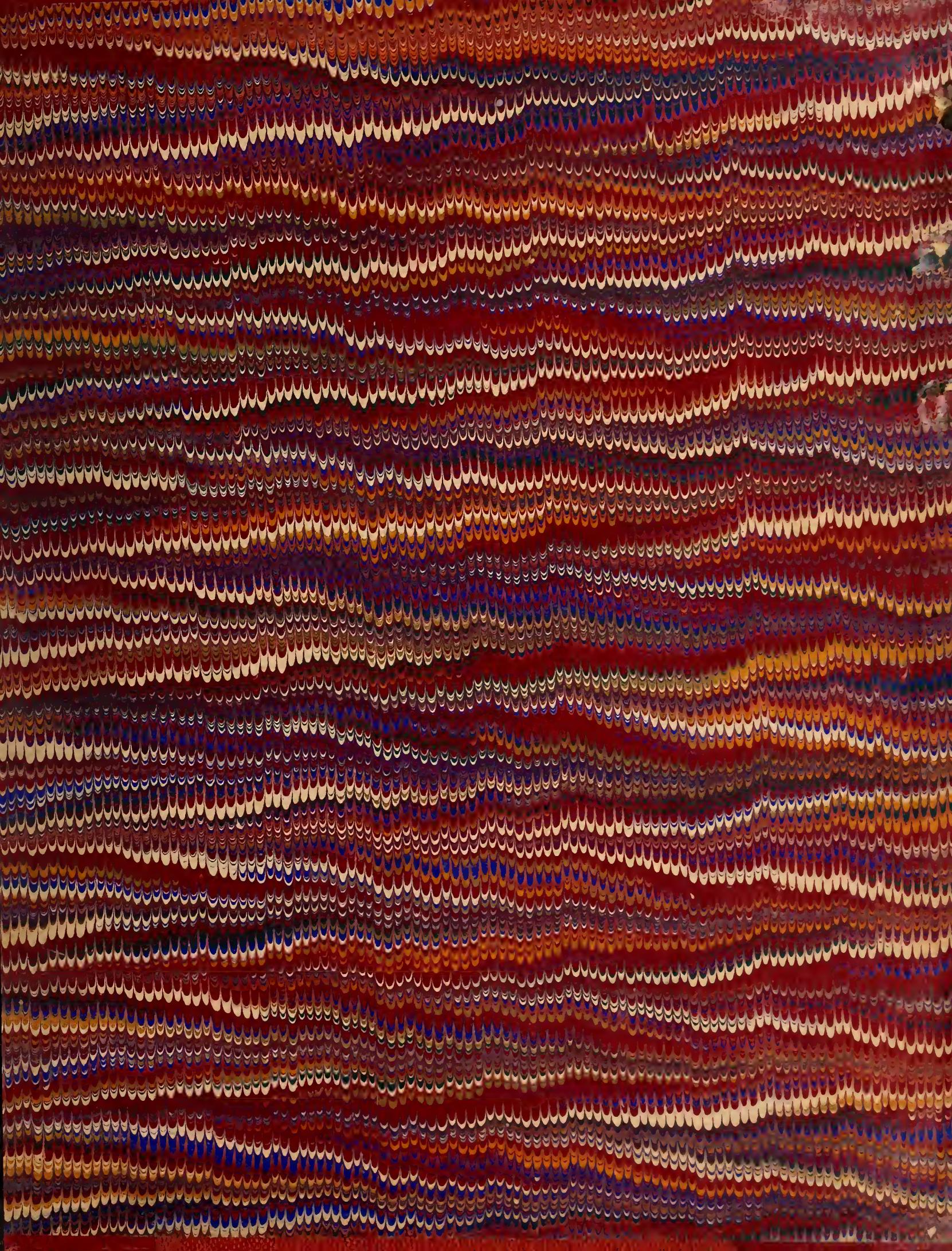




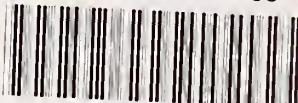








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